

Beyond the Bluff

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Beyond the Bluff

by [Rigel99](#)

Summary

Sequel to "The Vault" in which Will and Hannibal exorcise the remnants of the demons that besieged their relationship in their previous incarnations.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Prologue

“Will... Will? Please Will. Come back to us...” The voice was familiar. Muffled. Will wondered if he was still underwater, wrapped in the Atlantic’s cold embrace.

“I know you can hear me, Will. You’re stronger than this.” Now that the raging sea had him in her possession he could not imagine been given up so easily.

“You did it, Will. You survived the Dragon and the Ripper.”

Those words pulled him back to reality. Will spluttered the remnants of the water sitting on his lungs and heaved a breath.

“Hannibal’s dead?” He opened his eyes to be greeted by the sight of Jack Crawford and two medics standing above him, while a helicopter swooped over Lecter’s house, its spotlight trailing over the terrain. Will looked over to see Jimmy Price and Brian Zeller making their way into the house, no doubt to process their bloody tableau of the Dragon - their final dance.

“Presumed dead,” Jack continued. “We found you washed up on an outcrop of rocks below. Hannibal was nowhere to be seen but we have the search and rescue team scouring the area up here and along the coastline and beyond to cover all the bases.”

Will nodded weakly. He couldn’t speak. He felt an almost paternal touch brush across his forehead and down the side of his face not currently being tended to by the medical team.

“We need to get him to hospital stat,” he heard one of them say urgently to Jack. “We’ve halted the bleeding but need to check for internal injuries and treat for possible wound infection.” Through the pain wrecking his body, Will didn’t feel the needle filled with sedative and painkillers push into his arm.

Jack nodded dumbly, not taking his eyes off Will. He leaned down quickly before they lifted him into the ambulance.

“Still saving lives, Will.” Jack took a heavy breath and felt the swell of pride in his chest. He’d had been through hell and back, fought countless demons of immense guile and power, and conquered them all. Jack Crawford’s greatest creation. There was no way he was ever letting Will Graham go.

As the drugs started to take hold, through hooded eyes, Will saw these thoughts move across Jack’s face. He felt the possessiveness radiating from Jack and imagined himself back and bound in the shackles from which Hannibal had worked so hard to set him free. Such a fate after so much blood shed, sacrifices made and violence endured was unacceptable. Will did not belong to Jack or the FBI. That part of his life was over. He had made the Dragon his. Hannibal Lecter had set him free. And he had every intention of honouring the gift bestowed upon him by The Chesapeake Ripper.

The darkness of unconsciousness slipped over him as the door on the ambulance closed, relieving Will of the looming presence of Jack Crawford. And for a brief moment, Will was aware that something was missing. In death, he'd absorbed the power of the Dragon. He felt the beat of his wings in his mind. But Hannibal wasn't here. He remained in his mind palace, part of Will but his essence intact. Will smiled to himself.

Hannibal was still alive.

Chapter 2

Despite Will Graham's best efforts to unite them in death, Hannibal had indeed survived.

Hannibal returned to consciousness to the feel of a soft, delicate, familiar hand resting on his bare torso. What he had not felt until looking down at the owner of the hand, was that she was sewing the bullet wound in his lower abdomen. Chiyoh briefly met his foggy, unfocused gaze, assessing the extent of the damage. Bad, but not irreparably so, she considered to herself.

"You watched over me..." Hannibal whispered, groggy from the dull ache of exhaustion and pain.

"I watched your Dance with the Dragon. It was very beautiful. In my moments of doubt, Hannibal, I can always rely on you to remind me well why a beast such as you should not be caged."

"And I watched over you as promised," she continued, keeping her attention focused on the task of mending her broken mentor. "You taught me to always keep my promises, Hannibal. For broken promises are a dangerous thing."

He allowed himself a small smile despite the pain, because of the pain in fact. The pain told him he was indeed very much alive.

"Will?"

Chiyoh snipped the suture before replying. "When last I saw him, he was lying unconscious - or perhaps dead, I cannot be certain - on a small outcrop of rocks close by to where I rescued you. I made the decision not to rescue him."

"Why?" Hannibal asked, allowing himself a momentary pang for the loss of something precious.

"Two missing, unaccounted for bodies, and the FBI would never give up their search for you and your empath," she replied calmly as she packed away the first aid kit. She tucked it under the bed and continued while placing her hands folded on her lap. "In this way, I have assured you a modicum of freedom. If fate is kind to Will Graham and he has survived, he will protect you as you protected him. He will convince the authorities that you are dead." Despite years spent apart, Chiyoh's ingenuity never failed to impress Hannibal. But she did have an excellent teacher. "If he is dead, then so be it."

"So be it indeed," said Hannibal, feeling the exhaustion wash over his mind again, allowing the thought of his final kiss with Will to calm his adrenaline-thumping body, working over time to repair the inflicted damage.

She looked at him straight in the eye as though reading his thoughts. "And if he has survived, should you wish to resume your relationship when you are both fully recovered is something

I am certain both of you will give its due consideration.”

Hannibal remained silent as Chiyoh pulled the blanket back up over his now bandaged wounds, leaning over to whisper gently in his ear. “I am glad you are alive, Hannibal. I am not sure I could survive this world knowing you no longer existed.” She bestowed a light kiss on his cheek before withdrawing. “But as you know, passion and earthly desires will kill a man quicker than any knife or bullet. Be careful in yours, Hannibal.”

In no frame of mind for intellectual discourse on the subject, Hannibal allowed his body to relax as best it could. As his eyes slipped closed he asked, “where are we, Chiyoh?”

She stood to exit the room and leave him to his rest. “We are where I thought you would want to be.” She stood at the bedroom door and looked over her shoulder. “When you wake, we will eat. The table is set for three and I am sure, despite Will Graham’s absence, Dr DuMaurier will appreciate the company...”

Ten Weeks Later

His dogs, his fishing, his solitude.

Will Graham didn’t ask for much in life, and if he couldn’t have what he truly wanted - found and lost in the brief but memorable times spent with Dr Hannibal Lecter - he expected life just to let him be.

Life, however, had other ideas.

“I’m still recuperating, Jack,” Will said, walking along the jetty towards his boat, as Jack trailed after him like a dog that had caught the scent of a bone. “Dragons, Rippers, Shrikes. I feel like I’ve lived on the dark side of the fairytale for long enough. Time to find another Knight in shining armour to rescue the damsel-in-distress.”

He unmoored the line and was preparing to cast off, feeling his skin pierced by the unrelenting and persistent gaze of Jack Crawford. “You, Agent Crawford, as you well know, have done as much damage to me than any of the killers I helped the FBI catch,” Will said with more indignation than hurt.

Jack dropped his shoulders and sighed. It was as close to humble begging as Will had ever seen the man come. “People are dying, Will, becau— ...”

“Because of me?” Will concluded, as he hopped onto the deck of his boat. “Dammit Jack, people die every day. With or without the intervention of Will Graham.”

“A compromise then,” said Jack. He knew, despite all Will had endured, if he pushed hard enough and then relented with some concessions to appear to give Will an upper hand, he would more likely get what he wanted. “If you don’t want to catch the killers, help me teach the ones that do.”

Will started his boat before turning back to the Head of BAU. He didn't answer, but the look on Will's face was enough to give Jack a sliver of hope that his request would at least be considered.

Will took the rudder and guided the boat away from the dock towards open water. He didn't look back at the man standing on the jetty staring with resigned hopefulness after him.

Yes, Will Graham had learned much under the skilful and all-too-fascinating mind of Hannibal Lecter, including when to let your prey think they are the ones in control. Just enough resistance. Just enough give on the line to keep them intrigued. Will smiled as the fresh sea air whipped his face. Within two weeks, he would be back within the walls of the FBI, now a fox amongst the chickens. His turn to lure the man he loved back into his world.

Hannibal perused the online news with dwindling interest. Nothing to immediately catch his attention.

The FBI had reported his own death, but all mention of Will Graham and his involvement in taking down the Red Dragon had been quashed. Hannibal was none the wiser - almost frustratingly so - as to the fate of Will.

Until today, happening upon the front cover story of the rag he had often used to his own advantage which in its own turn, was used to publish the contents of the scum-encrusted bottom of the information barrel. The title was delicious in its ignorant premonition of the future.

FBI SACRIFICES ITSELF ON THE ALTAR OF KILLER PROFILER, WILL GRAHAM

The selling of law enforcement's soul in the name of saving lives.

There, staring back at him, was the man simply impossible to forget for all the layers of beauty he had bestowed upon Hannibal's world. Hannibal rarely dreamed. But in the weeks since their fall into the Atlantic, his nightly slumber had been frequently invaded by the sound, touch and scent of Will Graham. Hannibal had evolved. After their shared experience in the slaughter of the Dragon, he knew that the kill, consumption and artistic portrayal of his prey would no longer satisfy his appetite. Will's taste still lingered on his lips, sweeter than any meat. Evidently, for Will Graham to have willingly re-entered the hallowed halls of the FBI, he felt the same. The message was clear. Hannibal could see it in the look in his eyes as he gazed at the camera.

Here I am, Dr Lecter. Your move...

Chapter 3

To survive and thrive in this world, you had to either accept your position or improve upon it. Stand still and accept, and life would remorselessly sink her teeth into your throat and bestow your air and the space you occupied to another more deserving individual. Improve upon it, and life would see fit to reward you for your efforts in honouring her gift.

A mantra to live by. And Hannibal did.

Those who returned to the same watering hole over and over again, unaware of the patient predator observing and learning its moves, identifying its weaknesses were duly rewarded. And sometimes, if a predator could extend that patience beyond a simple satiation of hunger, the rewards would be even more delicious.

And Hannibal was a very patient predator indeed. He had waited a long time for Will Graham and his reward had been delicious beyond measure. Intelligent predators didn't just evolve, they evolved their environment to suit their own needs. Jack Crawford was an excellent predator but he was a reactionary one. Hannibal was the designer of the environment in which those reactions were played out. The outcome was always known, for the most part and adjustments could be made accordingly to account for chaos theory.

And chaos surrounded Will Graham. Beautiful, unbridled chaos. Jack Crawford was as hopelessly blind to this fact as Hannibal revelled in it.

The hunt for Hannibal the Cannibal had abated. Aside from the blood - Hannibal's blood - they would have found on Will when they processed him on the Night of the Dragon, Hannibal was a whisper in the wind as far as the FBI were concerned. Missing, presumed dead. As such, he felt no qualms about returning to Baltimore to visit his Wendigo.

Sitting in a quiet booth alone, Hannibal watched the patrons of The Vault. He checked his wristwatch. 10.11pm. In moments, they would be reunited. It took a lot of self-control on his part to remain still when Will made his appearance but a minute later, heading to the bar and ordering a whiskey. Hannibal watched the bracing posture in his lean frame and smiled. There was no doubt in his mind Will was steeling himself for either disappointment or elation at what awaited him in their designated meeting place. Hannibal was just about to rise when his sixth sense and survival instincts reared forward. Out of the corner of his eye, he found his focus drawn to another man also watching Will with borderline curiosity. He remained seated and watched the man as he downed his own drink and walked a straight line towards the empath. As he entered under the halo of the lights from above the bar, Hannibal recognised him.

Paul Brookes. Tattle Crime's most recent "journalistic" acquisition, filling the void left by Freddie Lounds. Equally as, if not more so, (were that possible) tasteless.

Hannibal wasn't close enough to hear the conversation but his vantage point at least afforded him lip-reading rights.

“Hello, Mr Graham.” Will was on his second shot of whiskey when he glanced to his side briefly before turning back to his drink with a roll of his eyes. “What’s a not-so-nice boy like you doing in a place like this?” Brooke’s enquired with mock innocence.

“It’s a free country, Brookes,” Will replied. “I mean it must be freer than most when your brand of journalism is allowed to proliferate and poison minds unabated.”

Brookes frowned. “I pride myself on highlighting the threats to our society, Mr Graham. I provide a worthwhile service to the public.”

Will chose not to answer. Deny the viper in stillness and restraint in the hopes it would slip away, bored. No such luck. “So. What ARE you doing here?”

“You know, when it comes to confronting me on my downtime, Mr Brookes, discretion really is the better part of valour.”

He placed his empty glass on the counter in front of him and gave Brookes a distasteful look as he brushed past him. “If you’ll excuse me…”

Hannibal remained in his seat as Will retreated to the dark room. He watched Brookes as the man watched Will. Please, Mr Brookes, thought Hannibal in silent prayer. Brookes gestured to the barman and watched as he slipped him a \$50 bill. Hannibal tilted his head at the audacity of the man as he noted the number mouthed by Brookes lips, confirming with the bartender the number of the seat in the dark room he and Will called their own. Brookes threw the guy a salacious smile as he turned to follow Will. The man’s tenacious rudeness and unwelcome curiosity would be the death of him.

It was 10.15pm. Will sat on his reserved sofa and allowed the memories to fuel his growing arousal. The seat beside him dipped but Will was instantly on guard. The weight felt wrong. It wasn’t Hannibal. “I’m sorry but that seat is taken.”

“It doesn’t feel taken to me. Until now,” Brookes replied.

“You really can’t take a hint, can you, Brookes?” came Will’s terse response.

Will’s heart leaped at the next sound from the darkness to penetrate his brain. “No. He really cannot.”

Hannibal.

“If you wouldn’t mind vacating the seat, before I have to assist you in fulfilling my request, I’d very much appreciate it.”

Brookes wasn’t equipped for a confrontation with a man whose voice broached no argument, and though he couldn’t see him at all, the sense of his presence caused the hairs on the back of his neck to prickle.

“Alright, alright,” he said, rising quickly from the seat. “Keep your panties on. I didn’t mean to intrude.”

“You did,” said Will. “Just don’t let it happen again and you might just be allowed keep more than your panties intact.”

The suggestion of a threat wasn’t lost on Brookes. “I’ll be seeing you, Mr Graham,” and as he brushed past Hannibal, heard the distinct sound of a deep inhale. “And I’ll be seeing you, Mr... Brookes, was it?” murmured Hannibal, low and level.

Brooke’s declined to respond as he beat his hasty retreat.

While Hannibal committed the man’s unpleasant odour to his memory banks, Will quickly dismissed his encounter with Brookes and zeroed his entire empathy on Hannibal. Pulling him down to the seat, he found his face with searching hands and lunged bodily towards him.

“I want you, Ha—“ Hannibal swallowed the word with a kiss before Will finished. Parting their lips, he whispered against his neck. “Not that name. Not here.”

Will nodded before resuming their kiss. “I’ve missed you so much. Please.”

Hannibal positioned himself between Will's thighs, wrapped in his arms. “You know I'd deny you nothing. It's why I risked coming," Hannibal whispered.

Time became irrelevant as they lost themselves to the endless re-familiarisation of each other. Increasingly dishevelled, Hannibal wasn’t quite sure how he managed the next words.

Not here,” he whispered against Will's mouth. “I won’t have our first time consummated in this place.”

“First time?” Will asked, face buried in Hannibal's hair.

“Our first time since your becoming in the Dragon’s blood, since my rebirth from the bowels of the Atlantic.” He bit back the growl rising in his throat at the feel of Will’s hands caressing firm flesh behind while undulating his hips forward into Hannibal’s, every point where their bodies met seeking to mould and absorb the skin of the other. Pulsing nerves, beating hearts, both men feeling the harmony of mutual rediscovery. “Not here,” Hannibal repeated into Will's temple. “You - We - deserve better.”

He rose, drawing Will up with him for one final long, deep, searching kiss, full of promise. “I’ll be in touch. Soon.”

“Wait.” Will grabbed his arm. “You know Brookes will be out there, stalking.”

“I know.” Hannibal leaned towards him to whisper quietly. “And I look forward to acquainting him with my kitchen.”

And then he was gone.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

A short one before the big reunion.

Even as we evolve, certain traits must remain intact. Rarely does a species survive spontaneous evolution, unless environmental conditions demand the leap that requires survival.

In the familiar backdrop of Baltimore, there are some traits therefore that Hannibal needed to retain in the interests of self-preservation.

While fond of hiding in plain sight, sometimes one must resort to using the shadows to their advantage, which is just fine. Particularly so when the territory is well traversed and utterly familiar. Sure-footedness in such circumstances is completely assured. As such, it should come as little surprise that Hannibal easily located the home of Paul Brookes and chose his moment to enter his property under cover of darkness to await the arrival of the man that would soon grace his dining table.

The least Hannibal could do was ensure the main ingredient in their first dinner since the Dragon was something they could both enjoy.

It had been two weeks since their reunion at The Vault. In his parting words, Will had expected the message that Hannibal would be in touch to translate into some form of design that would have Jack Crawford knocking on his door again. But then in hindsight, Hannibal had evolved. Why would he risk drawing unnecessary attention to himself or his presence within whispering distance of the BAU?

Will was exiting the building having finished with his classes for the day when he heard soft footfalls jog up behind him and fall into easy step beside him. Jimmy Price was a fairly easygoing character. Will found he didn't mind the momentary invasion of his space. He had, after all, evolved as well.

"Hey Will. You settled back in?"

"As well as can be expected all things considered, Jimmy," Will replied.

"Yeah. He left his mark on all of us but the world does seem a little quieter without him. Thanks to you."

"Little thanks to me. Hannibal made his own choice."

Jimmy decided not to argue, instead choosing to relay a bit of gossip. “Well he may be gone but the spectre of organ harvesting still seems to be trending. Maybe he let a particularly nasty and twisted genie out of its bottle.”

Will stopped in his tracks at that. “A new case?”

“Just an isolated incident and not actually resulting in a body for Z and I to prod and probe.”

“So what’s the story then?” Will asked curiosity piqued, though he had a lingering sensation in his stomach that his suspicions were about to be confirmed.

“Paul Brookes. Guy got home a few nights ago. Woke up the next day without a kidney.” They reached the exit, where they stood outside briefly before they parted ways. “Seriously. Those Tattle Crime reporters had some crazy karma!” he said with a shrug. “Anyway, maybe see you tomorrow, Will,” Jimmy smiled with a parting nod.

Will nodded in return and stood for a moment to process the news as Jimmy wandered off in the opposite direction from his. Looks like meat’s back on the menu, he thought to himself, with a slight smile.

Now it was just a case of when he’d receive his invite to dine with Hannibal, as he allowed various possible scenarios reflecting the outcome of their next rendezvous to wander hot and lust-fuelled across his mind. He entered his car to drive home, as aroused as he was hopeful that such scenarios would be acted out sooner rather than later.

And that invite would indeed come sooner than expected, though it would be none the less welcome for that.

Chapter 5

Earlier that afternoon

Perhaps love had made him reckless.

Unlikely. He is, as he always has been, Hannibal Lecter. Careful, methodical and utterly without remorse for choices made, lives taken and meals shared.

But love had certainly made him... He searched his mind for the correct word, unfamiliar as he still was with this tumultuous feelings roused within him at the mere thought of his empath.

Will Graham.

The first - and likely last - person who could take all of what defined Hannibal and his place in this humanity-soiled world and translate it in a way Hannibal could not. For all his artistry and expression of his version of beauty, it was only through Will's empathy the nature of Hannibal's being was elevated to something other worldly.

Love had made him... oh good Lord... whimsical?

He filed that word and its implication away for future analysis, concentrating his mind on the evening ahead. It wasn't reckless to have followed Will home to his new abode the week before. It wasn't reckless at all. Will, he had discovered, was no longer under surveillance as he no doubt had been placed in the weeks preceding their slaughter of the Dragon. Will, with his guile and newly heightened understanding of Jack Crawford's ruthlessness for achieving results in the name of "the greater good" had convinced Jack the sea had consumed him. Hannibal smiled as he imagined the conversation:

You survived, Will. And we both know too well Hannibal's penchant for clinging to life, particularly while staring Death in the face.

Much as it pains me to admit the magnetism I exude that brings the monsters to my door, but Hannibal loved me. He gave himself up to you when I rejected him in Wolf Trap. He gave himself up to Death in my ultimate rejection of that love when I dragged us both over the cliff edge. There is nothing left in this world of Hannibal Lecter but a blood-soaked legacy.

Yes. Hannibal could easily imagine Jack being convinced by those words. Wanting - needing - to be convinced that one less monster that plagued his dreams no longer existed. But like Hydra, Hannibal and his legacy would live on in another form, a new and beautiful design of exquisite function. One head had been severed, but two had grown back in its place. The pasts, present and futures of Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham twined and indistinguishable from each other. A blood-soaked legacy that included the becoming of his beautiful empath.

Hannibal parked his car behind Will's house, as sure as he was of the lack of other human life in the quiet countryside that surrounded Will's home. He noted the place was larger than that

with which he had been acquainted in Wolf Trap. As he strolled towards the steps leading to the back door of the property, Hannibal wondered if that meant Will had extended his canine family, a musing quickly cut short by the appearance on the back porch of a sleek-feline body with wide and striking amber eyes. The two predators looked at each other for a briefly appraising moment before the cat turned and sat by the door, looking over her shoulder at Hannibal again, this time expectantly. He easily gained entry, to be greeted by a scruffy-haired sheepdog, sporting a shining coat and bright blue, intelligent eyes - though unusual for the breed not unheard of. Hannibal slowly lowered his body to his haunches to bring him level with the animal, eyes flicking between Hannibal and the cat, weaving her way around Hannibal's legs as though marking interesting, newfound territory, claiming it as her own.

The dog tilted his head and stood up as Hannibal extended an open palm. He sniffed then licked the gloved fingers before turning his attention to the cat, greeting each other affectionately. Evidently, if the cat approved, the dog was in agreement with the assessment of the visitor.

One cat, predator prone to outdoor life roaming free, and one dog, an echo of a life left behind. Interesting. Killer some of the time, psychiatrist all the time, Hannibal thought to himself, as he probed the implications of this human-animal axis.

Continuing to the kitchen, Hannibal placed his bags, one containing the contribution of Paul Brookes to the evenings proceedings, on the counter. He looked around briefly but reigned in his curiosity and the urge for further exploration of the house and what new insights it would permit him into this new incarnation, just as the cat jumped up on the counter, distracting him from that urge, to make her own effort at exploring the contents of Hannibal's bags. He picked her up with little fuss and placed her on the floor. No, thought Hannibal, that privilege should be shared with Will. So he looked at the clock on the wall as he poured himself a glass of wine and began preparations for dinner.

In three hours or so, Will would be home and Hannibal would be here to welcome him.

Chapter 6

The evening was hovering on the edge of twilight when Will pulled up in front of his house. He was just slipping the key into the outer lock, about to call out to let George know he was home when he noticed the sliver of light cast from beneath the door to his kitchen. His first instinct was to reach for the gun in the drawer of the table inside the front entrance. He tuned his ears to the sounds beyond, giving way to that urge. A sizzling pan, the sound of a knife against a chopping board and the barely audible notes of a piano pressing out the delicate sounds of a moonlight sonata.

The tension left his body, allowing himself a smile and a slight shake of his head as he closed the door softly behind him. He walked silently up the hallway, pushed open the door and stood leaning against the jamb with his hands in his pockets to take in the scene before him. Hannibal stood with his back to Will, trusting and vulnerable in his display. Will did not doubt Hannibal was fully aware of his presence. He watched as the muscular planes across his back rippled beneath his shirt with the effort of whatever task in which he was currently indulging. Judging by the rapt attention currently being bestowed upon him by Amber and George, his beloved beasts who had barely spared him a second glance, it likely involved tenderising meat.

Hannibal dropped a sliver of red flesh to each of their waiting jaws before picking up a towel to wipe his hands and turning to face the empath.

“Will.”

The lines of Hannibal’s face softened as soon as his eyes fell on him, Will noticed, though out of habit more than defensiveness, his expression remained shuttered. This was still new in a way after all, new to a man who had not let his guard down since days spent running carefree through a Lithuanian forest with his baby sister. Will studied him as though seeing him for the first time. The lines and textures of his face he still felt the memory of beneath his fingers, standing on the brink of a cliff, teetering on the edge of a reality where neither man knew what would become of them. His long nose flared almost imperceptibly, frustration at being so close, but not yet touching. Enigma no more, laid bare at the altar of Will Graham’s empathy and understanding.

His body rested against the counter, hands gently gripping its edge, placed either side of his hips. Will approached slowly but without hesitation and pressed a soft kiss to his mouth, though they refrained from bodily contact anywhere else, a non-invasive caress of lips that Hannibal was all-too-willing to permit.

When they parted he was smiling. “Is it good to see me?”

Will smiled at the memory. “You in your entirety are impossible, Hannibal,” Will replied, shedding his jacket. “And yes. Beyond good, Dr Lecter.” He reached down to greet his animals, completely at ease in the presence of this man who had become firm friends it seemed, within mere minutes of greeting them himself. Perhaps they recognised the echoes

of Hannibal that Will had retained and nurtured within over their slowly developing relationship.

Will stood with Amber in his arms, both feline and empath gazed at Hannibal with penetrating, searching looks. Hannibal basked under the scrutiny of two such lovely creatures.

“So...” Will muffled through the fur.

“So,” said Hannibal. “I thought a meal and a conversation might be in order.” He dropped the kidney and steak pieces into the sizzling pan to brown.

“Piece by piece we have picked each other apart, Hannibal...” Will cradled the cat, purring contentedly in his embrace.

“And I hope we can put each other together again,” Hannibal replied as he turned his attention to the suet. He didn’t pause in his work as he continued, “We battled and shed blood in the chokehold of the FBI, we discovered each other in the darkness of the Vault...”

He gently pressed the dough into a waiting dish, all the while Will remained poised and attentive, eyes bright and knowing as Hannibal spoke. “We took from each other in my bed, we gave back to each other on the cliff. Where to go from here, Will...”

“Where indeed,” said Will, through an irrepressible smile. “I can’t decide if you set me free...”

“Or I shackled you up in chains.”

Will smiled. “The two may be mutually inclusive.”

“It would appear we need each other.”

“In temperance perhaps.”

“In all things,” said Hannibal, said with a smile. “But first,” as he dried his hands and removed his apron, “I would appreciate a tour of your home and to enjoy my wine before we enjoy the temperance of our meal.”

Will placed Amber gently on the floor as Hannibal poured him a glass of wine, handing it to him with a gentle brush of his fingertips across Will’s knuckles. Will smiled. A wholly different dance pursued this evening from their dance with the dragon but for that, it would be no less an experience of intense pleasure, of that Will was certain. Now, it was Will’s turn to lead.

“This way, Dr Lecter....”

Chapter 7

Will saves what he considers to be the best for last.

He is gratified when Hannibal agrees.

The room in question doubles as Will's study and bedroom. It is earthy in colour compared to Hannibal's tastes but an adequate and complementary reflection of the owner of the property, nestled in the wilderness. It is, however, similar in layout to Hannibal's former study and office in Baltimore. With the exception of the sleeping arrangements. Hannibal smiles.

"You're not even a little surprised, are you?" Will asks, as he takes a seat on the couch positioned where, in a former life, two low leather seats would once have faced across from one another. Sometimes vacant, sometimes occupied, but always permeated and resonant with the shared innermost secrets of dysfunctional people with little to hide other than the intensity of their own baseless insecurities.

Will Graham was no such patient.

Will Graham began as a curiosity, became a patient, transformed into friend and was reborn into Hannibal's deadliest enemy. Quite a journey to take to finally end up here, thought Hannibal, as he sank into the seat beside him, gazing with a contented and altogether far too pleased look gracing his features.

Will was staring into the middle distance, in obvious contemplation. "Do you know why I didn't shoot you when I had the chance?"

Hannibal in his turn, took a moment before answering. "I would hazard a guess that you had inner doubts regarding your own convictions."

"No," Will replied. "It was clear to me then that you were our man."

"Then why, Will? Tell me for what reason I need to be grateful you chose not to act on your instincts that day?" Hannibal asked, leaning forward, his curiosity about the answer genuine.

Will turned to look at him then. "Complete and utter selfishness combined with the heady mix of empathy for a predator with an incredible sense of survival. I knew killing you would save many lives. In that moment though, I also realised it would destroy me. Even in that moment, pointing a gun at your head, hearing Beverley's voice, Abigail's... all baying for your blood... Your voice drowned out all the righteous indignation of the dead demanding vengeance," he said as he downed his wine in one gulp, half-shamed, half-defiant at the choices he had made, knowing in truth that he wouldn't change a damn thing." He looked away again. "I didn't want vengeance. I wanted the answers you offered. And now, I have them..."

He frowned at the empty glass he was rising to his lips.

“I need more wine...” he grumbled, standing to head to the kitchen and retrieve the bottle.

But lost in the sights and sounds of the memory, Will hadn't noticed Hannibal had slid closer to him. Hannibal, unable to resist the pull of his words, the thought of Will unknowingly needing Hannibal even then, caused an almost involuntary grab for his waist, pulling him back down to the couch beneath him, earning Hannibal a surprised grunt from Will. Will, for his part, was transported back to The Vault, Hannibal surrounding him, swallowing his breath with a kiss, relentless and utterly dominant.

Will pushed him away with a smile. “As welcome as is the attention, Dr Lecter, I have other plans for you this evening which do not include the spoilage or wasting of the meal you have so lovingly prepared. And it would be a terrible shame to permit such a waste of space as Paul Brookes to go to waste, don't you agree?”

“I'm finding our present location very therapeutic and quite satisfying in itself, Will,” muttered Hannibal hoarsely before resuming his exploration of Will's neck. Will, feeling suitably pleased with himself and attractively dishevelled, did not bend to the man. Feeling the silent resistance, after a few moments and with some reluctance, he pulled away from Will.

Will would never bend to anyone again, thanks to the man himself. “I didn't think I'd ever be treated to the pleasure of seeing you lose control in such circumstances, Hannibal. It is quite the aphrodisiac,” Will said through a smile.

“As are you,” Hannibal replied succinctly, running long fingers through his own hair in an effort to regain a semblance of composure. “Had I known earlier in our relationship that you would reduce me to such base states, I'd have rid the world of you sooner.”

Will laughed warmly as he felt Hannibal tremble ever so slightly with the placing of a gentle palm on his face. Hannibal's features softened with his next words as he met Will's gaze. “Now I fear the window on that opportunity has well and truly passed and your loss to my world as re-shaped by you, would be unconscionable.”

Will stood and reached out to haul Hannibal up with him and into his embrace. “Far too late,” he nodded sagely. “Dinner and a show it is then.”

Hannibal refrained from asking what Will meant by a show, he was sure he would find out soon enough and some things in life, or perhaps only those things engineered by his empathy, deserved the element of surprise.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“We won’t make it to my bed at this rate, Hannibal, if you insist on such debauchery in a room you consider an inner sanctum no less...” The food sat plated behind them on the counter, awaiting their palatable attention. “And dinner will be ruined.” Will’s empathy flowed back and forth between them. The air was thick with Hannibal’s lust and Will was barely keeping his own in check as large hands splayed across his sides under his sweater, and up the smoother skin of Will’s back to flex a fingertip grip into his spine and pull him close.

“Dinner can wait. I am not sure my appetite for you however, Will, can.”

The carnal distractions would have to wait for them both. “You’ll spoil my surprise,” Will whispered in his ear. “And I believe you were the one who came here to cook dinner and suggested we have a conversation.”

“We can’t have that now, can we?” Hannibal pulled away. “And you are correct. I simply hadn’t wagered on your being quite so distracting, nor myself being quite so needful.”

Hannibal straightened his spine and coaxed his arousal into submission while Will straightened his clothing and grabbed the plates to place them on the small wooden table, set simply for two.

“You’ll forgive the absence of Leda and the Swan to oversee our dinner, I hope,” Will said as he pulled out one of the chairs.

“We have a wholly more captivated audience,” replied Hannibal, taking his own seat while casting a glance at the animals sitting dutifully on the other side of the kitchen, obedient, attentive, hopeful. “You have them very well trained.”

“Almost as well trained as you had me, Dr Lecter,” said Will, not missing a beat.

“Yet look at you now,” Hannibal replied, raising his glass in salute to his host. “Reborn in blood, devastating, pure, meant to be.”

Will raised his own in answer.

Hannibal waited for Will to take the first mouthful of his rustic creation, watched as it slipped past inviting lips and melt on his tongue. Will’s smile would have been praise enough, but his comment elicited a brief laugh from his companion. “It would seem some Tattle Crime reporters are not as tasteless as others. My compliments to the chef.”

Hannibal dipped his head at the seal of approval. They were halfway through the meal, both enjoying the comfortable silence before Will decided to broach the subject.

“So. What did you wish to talk about?” Will said, savouring the flavours as they slid down his throat.

Hannibal ran his fingers absently along the stem of his glass, thinking.

Will decided to assist the process. “Allow me then,” he said, Hannibal raising an eyebrow to his hairline, as he also raised his pudding-laden fork to his lips.

Will unfolded his napkin thoughtfully and placed it in his lap with care. “What was the name of the first person whom you loved unequivocally and unconditionally?”

“You already know the answer to that, William.” Calm, but with a hint of terseness hovering on the edge.

“I want to hear you say her name.”

“Mischa,” Hannibal replied, doing an admirable job of keeping the emotion from his voice.

“And the loss of that love has left a black hole in your soul that you have never been able to fill since.”

“Yes.”

“And here you are now, thinking that you can fill it with me?” Will’s smile is soft and completely non-judgemental, knowing as he knows. “You do realise you don’t love me, don’t you?”

“I beg to differ, Will.”

“You love the idea of me, yes. Not the same. You love my empathy because the idea of someone who understands and accepts you for what you are is fulfilling in itself. As Mischa did.”

“That Hannibal is what you are trying to recapture,” Will concluded.

Hannibal should hardly be surprised at Will’s cleverness. It was part and parcel of the appeal of the package in which he came. “If I were to agree with that assessment on what you and I are, would it lessen what we are? What we share?”

“I am not trying to lessen it. I simply want us to be clear. You deserve that much, Hannibal. I would not see you hurt again. However...” He reached across the table and grazed the back of Hannibal’s hand with gentle fingers.

“I believe your emotional faculties remain intact, buried beneath the layers of time that distance you from the loss of your sister.”

He gazed at Will, once then a shy and introverted boy, only barely able to meet another person’s eyes for mere seconds, sitting before him now, dissecting him in a fashion that not even Bedelia DuMaurier had attempted for all her intelligence. How far he has come. Don’t stop now, my beautiful empath...

Will stood then. “And one way or another, we are going to find out tonight if those layers can be penetrated.” He paused at the door. “Is Hannibal Lecter capable of forgiveness? True, absolute forgiveness.”

Will took a breath as though steeling himself for some arduous task. “Please,” the tone of his voice verging on command. “Occupy yourself for 20 minutes with the dishes and then come to the bedroom. Second door at the top of the stairs.”

“Is this the show you mentioned earlier?” Hannibal enquired.

Will simply smiled. “Twenty minutes, Hannibal.”

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter: The Death of Will Graham

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A Night at The Vault, a lifetime ago...

There is a high price paid by lovers for their pleasure and freedom, a price levied in physical and emotional vulnerability. Pleasure taken and given, and the freedom to express those pleasures with a willing and compliant partner are the rewards.

Right now, in the darkness of the Vault, one's vulnerabilities were concealed. It was perhaps why Will Graham was feeling especially compliant and very open in the arms of his Ripper.

"Have you ever killed someone?" whispered Will to the invisible form reclined beside him.

"An unusual question. We have all thought of killing someone at some point in our lives. Have you?" the stranger asked in a bemused tone, allowing the palm of his hand to travel in a slow, sensual path up and down Will's back, goosebumps left in its wake across yielding, yearning flesh.

"I've thought about it," said Will, a hand resting on the Ripper's chest, idly curious at its steady, rhythmic beat despite the nature of his question. He turned his face into his neck. "And yes."

Will felt the reactive tension of the body stretched out by his side, and in the absence of his sense of sight, mistook interest and arousal for fear. "Don't worry. It was a justified act. Self defence. And he was a serial killer targeting young teenage girls."

"How terrible for you. Such an act must surely change a person," the Ripper said softly.

"It certainly changed me," Will said, allowing the hand on his chest exploratory rights as they travelled down to caress the curve of a hip. "It compromised who I was. Screwed up my head for a long time."

"And now?"

"Now..." Will whispered, turning his face up to meet his Ripper's, "the fog is lifting," *a kiss*, "and life," *again*, "is feeling decidedly," *a bottom lip trapped between his own*, "more promising."

Open, pliant and glorious in the darkness above him, Hannibal could almost see the darkness around Will bleed into him, while Will Graham's kiss flowed through him like rain.

Will Graham's home, the present

Hannibal dried his hands and looked at the clock. Two minutes. He gave the cat a gentle rub behind her ears as he exited the kitchen, allowing his thoughts to wander and explore the possibilities of Will's intentions. Little, even in Hannibal's experience, could have prepared him for what awaited him. Awaiting them both.

Hannibal stood in the open doorway of Will's spare bedroom, realisation dawning on why Will had bypassed this room on their turn around the house.

"It gives me such pleasure, to my very core, that I can surprise a man of your sensibilities, Hannibal."

Hannibal, unmoving, took in the scene before him. Will stood on a wooden chair, stripped down to his briefs. A solid noose snug around his neck, his arms stretched and suspended at shoulder height. The soft drip.... drip.... drip of blood from the self-inflicted knife wounds on Will's inner forearms the only sound to complement their breathing.

Hannibal stepped inside and closed the door. His body was fighting between intellectual and physical arousal, punctuated by the betrayal felt from the memories of his own attempted murder by proxy flashing through his mind. It was a very new, very interesting sensation...

"Why, Will? Why are you doing this?" whispered Hannibal, half confused, half awed.

"Catharsis. For both of us. If we are to be together, and I do want us to be together Hannibal, everything in our pasts must be abandoned, forgotten, forgiven. Wholly and with no remorse."

The clarity in Will's eyes as he spoke had Hannibal enraptured. "For too long, we have allowed the things that have thrown us together to tear us apart. I want more for you and I."

Will, by all appearances, was completely committed to this course of action. "You will watch me die in the manner in which I once almost took your life."

Hannibal saw no reason to deviate or interfere with his plan. For now. "Then, should you wish to do so, you will bring me back from the brink of death. If that is what you want."

"Will—"

"Save me, Hannibal. Or let me die," Will said, a curl at the corner of his mouth. "The fate of the lamb is in your hands now."

Hannibal tilted his head. Will actually looked like he was enjoying the moment. Both men, more than equal, giving and taking the power contained in this moment to and from each other, one breath to the next.

"You've never shied from playing God before Hannibal. Don't start now." Will lifted a foot and placed it against the back of the chair beneath his feet.

"You would do this... for me?" Hannibal said, eyes shining bright.

“For us,” he said, meeting Hannibal’s eyes with a look of complete and unreserved conviction. Before tensing his leg and pushing back.

Chapter End Notes

The final chapter is probably going to take a little longer to scribe, but hopefully it'll be worth the wait. :)

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Gosh, I'm going to miss these guys. Every time I finish a story, I want to start another. Sigh...

Anyway, here's the swan song. Hope you like and comments welcome if the mood takes you. Thanks for reading, AO3ers.

Will opened his eyes. Hello Darkness, my old friend.

Moonlight spilled across pale skin.

"You're awake," Hannibal's sleepy rumble suggested he had woken only moments before Will.

"More to the point, Doctor, I'm alive."

"I feel obliged to point out my motives were utterly selfish in that regard," Hannibal replied in his low, quiet timbre.

"Aren't they always..." mumbled Will, raising a hand to his bruised neck while the other ran absently over the scar that adorned his lower torso.

"Will raised himself on his elbows to get a better vantage point of the shadow sitting and watching him intently from the foot of the bed in his study. "Even now? Only selfish?" he asked with a small smile. "Not even a hint of emotion? A pang of want? A stab of the love that stayed your hand?"

Hannibal did not hesitate as he crawled out of his chair, pulling off his sweater en route up the bed to hover over Will. "All of the above and more. So much more..."

He rested some of his weight into the prone empath beneath him. "In the end, Will, you will die by no others hand but my own, and even then, it will be only as an act of mercy."

Beautiful, strong, and well-made, utterly male... These are some of the physical qualities that Will has come to appreciate about Hannibal. Dark, dangerous, with a sense of constantly coiled but always controlled just barely suppressed below the surface were some of the others. Will's present goal was to spring that coil.

"You've tangled my normally well-organised threads of reality into a shimmering mess, William. What am I to do with you?"

Will reached for Hannibal, pulling their faces close. "Show me."

"Show you?"

"What it means to have saved something you love..."

Hannibal walked around Will to grab the discarded chair as he took Death's hand.

"There is a school of metaphysical thought that theorises that in the second before a person dies, their entire life flashes before their eyes," Hannibal said, after releasing Will's lips.

"Not true," Will whispered, raising his lower body from the bed as Hannibal slid his hand down beneath their waists to free Will first and then himself.

He sat before him. Hannibal had seen Death take life firsthand before. But not like this.

"Oh?" whispered Hannibal, warm and enquiring as he explored Will's body with gentle lips and a warm, smooth tongue.

As he watched the burning light slowly leave Will's eyes, he suddenly became that helpless boy again. The look in Mischa's eyes burning his heart: they held fear but no sense of blame, only unparalleled love for her brother and regret that he had to watch her die, that this would be his final memory of her.

"Not for me at least," Will replied, struggling to put into words the experience while Hannibal gently roused his interest, all the while kissing the bruises around his neck, bruises worn and endured for him and him alone. "I imagine each experience is unique to the individual."

As he watched Will die, he realised this was someone he loved as well, and here and now, he was far from helpless in preventing his death.

"I saw a collage of my most self-affirming, life-defining moments, stretching out endless before me, in lives lived and countless lives to come. I saw my mother when I opened my eyes for the first time; the first puppy my parents bought me for my birthday; I felt the churning in my stomach on the day I realised my mother was gone and would never come back..." Will whispered as he gently touched Hannibal's face hovering above him, rocking them gently together. Will felt his legs rise up and around Hannibal's waist, enveloping him in the life-force he had reignited.

Even in the last throes of life, as Will's body spasmed with the effort to take the breath that was denied him by the rope sharp and unyielding around his throat, Hannibal felt the colours around him fade.

"My second kiss..." Will said.

"What happened to your first?" Hannibal whispered, eyes closed, losing himself to the feel of the man, warm, perfect and very much alive.

“Oh she was terrible,” Will said, running his teeth light along Hannibal’s jaw, as he felt Hannibal slide beneath him. “All teeth and tongue. Painfully shy. Him, on the other hand...”

There was no choice.

Hannibal couldn’t restrain a smile at the thought of his first real kiss with Will Graham. “Like this?” Breaking the contact and catching his breath after a few moments, Will said, “Actually, more like a close second to a shared moment on a certain clifftop.”

A world without Will was no world at all. Hannibal rose from the chair, grabbed the machete from the nearby bed and swung.

Words, like blood, like bodies shared in the dark cleansed by moonlight, were powerful and if permitted, bind us irreparably to our destiny.

Beast and Lamb, as one, would know these beautiful little deaths many times before Death Himself came to claim his due.

“Tell me more about Mischa.”

“I loved her more than I loved my own life.”

“But you ate her...”

“Unwittingly yes, but I did not kill her.”

“The ugliness of her death is the driving force of your desire to rid the world of its own ugliness. You see it as your duty.” Hannibal remained silent. No words necessary. “And saving me?”

“You are as beautiful as she was. In all ways. Losing you is unthinkable and affording me the opportunity to challenge Death for your soul... Thank you, Will.”

He laid his hand on Will’s chest to feel the beat of a heart he had almost lost, imagining as he had earlier that night, reaching through his breastbone and massaging its eerily still chambers back to life. “I tried to make a family with you. With Abigail. But when the emotional price with which that came began to manifest, I knew too many circumstances would leave my control. I had to take control back. The only means by which I could achieve that, was killing you both.”

Hannibal raised himself on an elbow to look down at Will. “You were not so much trying to kill yourself as trying to save me, were you Will?”

“Busted.” Will gave a non-committed shrug in answer then smiled. “In hindsight, trying to kill each other kept failing in spectacular fashion. I thought a different tactic would be in order. A compromise. Taking lives was all you knew, knowing how to save them, my forte.”

“Wounds of love lie as deep as the scars left in their place sit high and angry against all we do to try and heal them,” Hannibal whispered as Will rolled him onto his back and silenced him.

Hannibal moved beneath Will like the sea, tame but untamed and so much still to be chartered. Will never took his eyes from his face and anchored his body to the motion, careful not to jar nor rock too hard, merely lull his body back to life, back to this moment.

“So. What now, Dr Lecter?”

“Well, I have a standing appointment with one Mr Brookes. Perhaps we should return for a second course...”

“Brookes.... I meant to ask why you had spared his life. Aside from wishing to avoid unwanted attention which I’m sure you would have handled with your usual skill.”

The truth is, Will, I couldn’t bring myself to kill him.” He paused. “I couldn’t bring myself to end him...” he trailed his lips across Will’s shoulders, eyes soft and warm, “without you... ..without you by my side,” he continued across his cheek to capture Will’s lips between his own. “After the Dragon, the act lacked the dimension, colour and depth I had come to associate with the experience.”

Will’s eyes were warm and knowing as he spoke, keeping unwavering contact with Hannibal's own. “I predict the Chronicles of one Hannibal Lecter are about to turn a very interesting page...”

END

End Notes

As if it were possible, I have ideas for a third instalment. Hopefully you'll continue to follow the Hannigram trail of destruction... :D

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!